

February 13, 2006 The Bush administration released a proposed 2007 budget last week that increases federal spending to a staggering \$2.77 trillion, a sum that is 4 times larger than the Reagan-era budgets of the early 1980s. With a public angry about useless earmarks and bridges to nowhere, and a Republican congressional delegation promising to restore some small measure of fiscal discipline, it's troubling that the administration chooses to ignore economic reality and increase spending without regard to revenues and deficits. Consider these sobering facts:

- With a 7% rate of growth, federal spending will double in a decade.
- Federal spending has grown twice as fast under Bush than Clinton, averaging 6 and 7% increases compared to the 3 and 4% increases of the 1990s.
- The biggest increases in federal spending under Bush are not related to the war on terror or homeland security. Education spending, for example, grew a whopping 137% between 2001 and 2005.
- The projected deficit for 2006 is \$423 billion, \$100 billion more than 2005. The real 2006 deficit, including the \$5 billion per week we spend in Iraq, will be much, much higher.
- The administration will ask for at least \$120 billion in so-called "off budget" funds for Iraq and Afghanistan over the next year, perpetuating the deception that war spending somehow doesn't count toward the budget deficit.
- The new Medicare prescription drug benefit will cost at least \$30 billion in 2006, and is projected to cost \$1.2 trillion over the coming decade. The program creates an unfunded liability twice the size of future Social Security obligations.

There has been a great deal of talk in Washington about scandals lately, but few seem to understand that enormous federal budgets provide the mother's milk for every backroom deal, questionable earmark, and sleazy lobbying trick. Like many of my Republican colleagues who curiously vote for enormous budget bills, I campaign on a simple promise that I will work to make government smaller. This means I cannot vote for any budget that increases spending over previous years. In fact, I would have a hard time voting for any budget that did not slash federal spending by at least 25%, especially when we consider that the federal budget in 1990 was far less than half what it is today. Did anyone really think the federal government was not big enough just 16 years ago?

Neither political party wants to address the fundamental yet unspoken issues inherent in any budget proposal: What is the proper role for government in our society? Are these ever-growing entitlement and military expenditures really consistent with a free country? Do the proposed expenditures, and the resulting taxes, make us more free or less free? Should the government or the marketplace provide medical care? Should the U.S. military be used to remake whole nations? Are the programs, agencies, and departments funded in the budget proposal constitutional? Are they effective? Could they operate with a smaller budget? Would the public even notice if certain items were eliminated altogether? These are the kinds of questions the American people should ask, even if Congress lacks the courage to apply any principles whatsoever to the budget process.